

Utah's second oldest burial is found

11-13-91
Prehistoric man dated to 3500 B.C.

Special to the Herald

Researchers have dated the remains of a prehistoric man and dog found during the summer in the mud on the western shores of Utah Lake to about 3500 B.C., making this the second oldest burial ever found in Utah.

Remains of the state's oldest resident (from about 4500 B.C.) were found in a cave near Richfield. Both finds belong to the Archaic period, a time of prehistory dating from about 7000 B.C. to the time of Christ.

"This is the first Archaic burial documented on the Utah Lake shoreline and only the second pre-farming burial ever found in Utah," said Brigham Young University archaeologist Joel C. Janetski. "We thought we might have an Archaic man, but until we got results from radio carbon dating, we knew we could be wrong. You cannot believe how excited we are to analyze this discovery."

The burial recovery was accomplished with the assistance of graduate students and volunteers from the Utah County Chapter of the Utah Statewide Archaeological Society.

Ongoing analysis is a joint effort between Brigham Young University and the University of Utah, with Janetski doing research on the various artifacts found with the burial and professor John McCullough, a physical anthropologist from the U of U, analyzing the human remains. Students and staff from the U of U are studying the dog remains, and BYU students and staff are examining the pollen. The Utah Division of State Lands and Forestry — the landowner — is

providing funding for dating the site.

What particularly interests Janetski are textiles (twined juniper bark matting and coiled basketry) found over the man's pelvic area.

"Any kind of textile should have disintegrated long ago," he said. "The burial site has apparently remained wet through the ages, which has helped preserve some of the material."

A sample of the juniper bark matting was submitted to a lab to date the burial.

Janetski says the basket may have held bone awls and other tools found at the site by a sheriff who investigated the area before the Utah archaeologists arrived. Burial goods also include a large stone spear point and antler "flakers," perhaps used in knapping stone tools.

Janetski noted that, although this find is not the earliest evidence of people in Utah Valley, it "gives us insights into the lives of early peoples we didn't have before."

For example, the way the individual was buried and the burial location differ from the pattern of the Utes who occupied the valley when Mormon pioneers arrived in Utah in 1847.

"These differences suggest that this individual and the Utes may be unrelated, although during a span of more than 5,000 years, cultural patterns certainly could have changed," Janetski said.

The location of the burial near the lake reinforces the idea that the lake was a hub of prehistoric life during the Archaic period as it has been for most people who have made Utah Valley their home.

Two Utah County fishermen



Photo courtesy of BYU

BYU anthropologist Joel Janetski examines textiles and tools found at the site of a 5,500-year-old burial on the shore of Utah Lake.

found a human skull in the mud in late July and reported the discovery to the Utah County sheriff, who removed additional bones and had them analyzed by the state Medical Examiner's office.

"The sheriff thought the man may have been a victim of foul

play until the state office identified the bones as prehistoric," Janetski said.

Janetski believes much of the value in discovering the burial comes from the insights it provides about the people.